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ABSTRACT

Although many educators have stated that children from low socioeconomic homes do not have the opportunities to learn as much compared to those of higher income levels, government officials do not accept that argument. They say that all should achieve the proficiency level in reading. This paper outlines the following ways the reading gap might be eliminated: (1) the problem needs clear identification, such as in phonics or comprehension; (2) besides retired teachers tutoring children in reading, a student who needs additional help in becoming a reader may attend summer school; (3) teachers should have a list of available tutors who may be hired by parents willing to pay for reading instruction services; (4) parents should read aloud to students in the home setting; (5) the school library and the public library should have a wide assortment of children's literature to capture student interest; (6) reciprocal reading may be stressed when the parent and child are exploring library book content; (7) the child and the parents in the home setting should take turns in telling stories which have been read; (8) students might wish to illustrate certain content read from a library book to show comprehension; (9) in-depth construction activities may be pursued by the student to show meaning and understanding of subject matter read; and (10) the child and his/her parents might dramatize literary content. The paper also outlines ways the reading teacher needs to perform to eliminate the gap. It cites several activities which can assist students to achieve optimally and close the gap in reading achievement. It also discusses workshops for teachers and assessment of student achievement. (NKA)

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Closing the Gap in Reading.

by Marlow Ediger

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CLOSING THE GAP IN READING

Much criticism has been made of the gap in achievement of children from inner city areas as compared to suburbia. The thinking is of legislators, governors, and other public officials that the gap in reading achievement should be minimized or eliminated. When observing standardized, as well as state mandated test results, there is a broad gap in reading achievement and progress between these two groups.

Many educators have stated that children from low socio-economic homes have not had the opportunities to learn as much as compared to those of more favorable income levels. Government officials do not buy that argument. They say that all should achieve the proficiency level in reading instruction. Thus, the gap needs to be studied and eliminated.

How Might the Reading Gap to be Eliminated?

First, the problem needs clear identification, such as in phonics or comprehension. Next resources need to be marshaled to zero in on the identified problem. A cooperative endeavor needs to result to assist all pupils to become better readers. No gap should result, among pupils in reading, when zeroing in on the problem. Which avenues are then available to pupils and teachers? Pupils who do not achieve well need to have a specially designed reading program to attain more optimally (See Ediger, 2002, 112-117).

One approach which may be used is private tutoring on a one on one basis. There are a number of retired teachers who desire to tutor part time. The time schedule may be worked out with the retirees. Retired teachers, no doubt, have had the training and experience to do a good job of tutoring. They need to be encouraged to participate as tutors.

Tutoring may be emphasized before the school day begins. Better yet is to stress tutoring after the school day has ended. However. either approach is good to use. Saturday is anther good time for tutoring. Those pupils who need tutoring and those teachers who can come for tutoring may wish to stress Saturday as being an open day for the tutoring process.

Retirees need to diagnose and remedy reading deficiencies. The retired teacher needs to have several basals ready and listen to a tutee read to notice the approximate reading level of the involved child. These readers will be marked as to which grade level each is to be used on. However, the tutored pupil will reveal a possible starting point in reading regardless of the grade level

of the pupil or the grade level of the basal reader. Thus, a rough estimate of the pupil's reading ability may be obtained through the 100 running word method. Here the teacher marks off 100 running words within a paragraph. If the pupil can identify 95 words correctly orally, that book might be on his/her reading level, providing that the pupil can answer correctly three of four questions covering the content read. Generally, if the per cent of words identified correctly goes below the 95% level and comprehension goes below the 75% level, understanding of subject matter read will go downhill. The teacher can make modifications, as needed, in the child's reading program. One modification is to read aloud with the pupil(s) so learners might see and hear the oncoming words (Ediger, 229- 236).

Hopefully, the pupil will make continuous progress under the retired teacher's guidance.

Second, in addition to retired teachers' tutoring children in reading, a pupil who needs additional help in becoming a reader, the learner may attend summer school. Summer school should be free and open to all who desire it. The summer school program needs to focus upon a developmental program of reading. The objectives of instruction here, need to build upon where the learner is presently in reading achievement. Methods of instruction must develop the interests of pupils in reading. A wide selection of library books need to be available to children so that the interest factor might be stressed when learners select reading materials. The teacher needs to be effective in motivating pupils to read. He/she needs to have teachers who can help pupils in word recognition and identification. Ample opportunities must be given to guiding pupils to revel what has been comprehended in reading. The reading environment needs to be stimulating with pictures on classroom walls of new book jackets, of library book characters, and a library corner containing books on a variety of genre, topics and reading levels. The number of pupils per teacher should be 15 to one, or less. The number needs to be small so that each pupil may obtain the assistance needed to become a good reader.

Third, teachers should have a list of available tutors which may be hired by parents who are willing to pay for reading instruction services. The listing should contain names of qualified teachers of reading only. A safe, wholesome place needs to be available for tutoring. There are parents who are willing to pay for quality tutoring services.

Fourth, parents should read aloud to pupils in the home setting. Teachers should model, for parents, how to read aloud effectively to children. Proper voice inflection needs to be used

together with eye contact while orally reading to pupils. As the reading act continues in the home setting, children need to view the related pictures as the abstract words are read. Viewing the pictures as the content is being read makes for meaningful learning. It is good, too, if parents discuss library books read which learners have read.

Fifth, the school library as well as the public library need to have a wide assortment of good children's literature which wold capture pupil interest. Expository, creative, and narrative library books should be readily accessible to children, as well as to adults. If adults read to themselves, pupils will observe the role model and then also desire to do more reading. Available quality literature on different reading levels encourages pupils to engage in reading of more library books.

Sixth, reciprocal reading may be stressed when the parent and child are exploring library book content. Thus, the parent may read a short selection followed by the child also reading a paragraph. It takes a variety of kinds of reading activities to motivate and encourage pupil reading.

Seventh, the child and the parents in the home setting need to take turns in the telling of stories which have been read. The learner then attaches meaning to the ensuing story being told. The order and sequence of the story told aloud are vital elements in telling about, appreciating and understanding of children's literature.

Eighth, pupils might wish to illustrate certain content read from a library book to show comprehension. Diverse media may be used such as pencil sketching, crayons, water colors, and scraps of cloth.

Indepth, construction activities may be pursued by the pupil to show meaning and understanding of subject matter read and contained in print form. Cardboard boxes and scrap wood may be used to construct and indicate comprehension of content. These are excellent activities for pupils and parents in the home setting and can add enjoyment to ensuing reading experiences.

Tenth, the child and his/her parents might dramatize literary content. To use action in dramatizing what has been read provides for variety, interest, and purpose in reading. Novelty and newness of activities help to continuously bring out feelings of creativity within children.(Ediger and Rao, 2000). Learning is enjoyable and rewarding!

To close the gap in reading achievement, the teacher, parents, and the child need to explore different possibilities of motivating reading achievement. All need to work together for the

good of the child.

Teaching Reading to Eliminate the Gap

The reading teacher needs to secure the attention of all pupils when teaching reading. Minority pupils tend to be children who make up the at gap group. To close the gap, pupils need to be well motivated in order to achieve more optimally in reading. One source of motivation is to increase interest levels. The reading materials chosen must pass the criterion of being interesting. If a teacher cannot secure the interests of pupils, then, probably minimal learning will accrue. Interest within pupils can be observed. The whole hearted involvement of pupils in reading a given selection is quite noticeable. Interest can also be developed if not there initially. To develop interest in closing the reading achievement gap, the teacher must build background information within pupils relating directly to the content to be read. There are teachers who go to a lot of work in building related knowledge within pupils, before having then engage in actually reading the ensuing story. The follow are ways of doing this:

1. view and discuss the illustrations in the book, prior to reading its contents.
2. bring in additional illustrations for discussion in order to stress indepth learning.
3. show and discuss a video tape which clarifies several concepts in the story.
4. use voice inflection to describe the setting of the story.
5. print the new words to be read on the chalkboard and discuss their meaning as they will be used in the story.

A major goal here is to close the gap among learners in reading achievement. Adequate knowledge aids pupils to bridge the gap between the learner and the story to be read.

The teacher needs to decide when an adequate number of activities have been provided pertaining to building background information within pupils, prior to reading the new selection. A question or problem needs identification for which pupils read to secure an answer.

After the reading has been completed, the discussion of the answer to the problem(s) may be entertained. Also, additional questions raised by children might also be discussed.
What might be salient questions and problems for pupil consideration? These topics may include

* characterization. Does the character change and grow over time? In what ways?

* setting of the story. Where does the story take place and how does it affect the plot?

* plot. What happened in the story? Was the plot predictable? Why or why not?

* point of view. Who is telling the story and how does it help to describe the character?

* satire. What use does the author make of satire?

* irony. How does the author use irony, if use is made of this device? (See Gunning, 2000).

Each of the above named activities should assist pupils to achieve optimally and engage in closing the gap in reading achievement among learners.

During the time of actual reading of the ensuing subject matter, the teacher needs to assist pupils to identify unknown words while reading. Each pupil should be motivated to stay on task.

Followup reading activities should include participating in a discussion covering subject matter read. Pupils may write in their journals on unusual words met up with in print. They might also indicate questions they have on story content which they would like to discuss.

Assessment procedures to notice skill and comprehension in reading are the following:

* have pupils draw an illustration to reveal comprehension of a certain facet of the story read.

* have a committee of pupils develop a mural on story content read.

* have a committee of learners plan to dramatize the story.

* choose learners to do a reader's theater covering story content.

* have pupils make models pertaining to objects covered in the story read.

* have each pupil keep and date diary entries on story content.

* have selected pupils read other stories written by the same author.

* have pupils individually choose what they would like to do for a followup experience.

Each of these activities should assist pupils to work hard in closing the gap among learners in reading. The psychology of

learning needs to be followed closely in providing learning opportunities for children in closing the reading gap:

* pupils should experience challenging materials in reading instruction. These reading materials should encourage and spur pupils on to greater achievement in reading.
* pupils need to put forth optimal effort to read as well as possible. They need to take advantage of challenges put forth by the teacher and by other pupils in the class setting.
* pupils should feel enriched as a result of quality reading instruction. There is then no time to waste in learning, achieving, and developing. Time is too precious to waste. Rather pupils love reading and what it entails. Learners like to secure fascinating new ideas, skills, and knowledge.
* pupils like to be read to at home and in school. Knowledge acquired here provides readiness for achieving reading goals in school.
* pupils develop appreciations for literature which does indeed provide for increased reading skills and and acquired knowledge.
* pupils develop interest in diverse kinds of literature, including reading poetry, subject matter, narrative writings, expository, and prose.

Motivated readers achieve at a higher rate than do the non motivated. This should assist in loosening and narrow the gap among readers of different social economic levels.

Workshops for Teachers to Narrow the Reading Gaps

Workshops need to be held for teachers to narrow the gap among pupils in reading achievement. There are diverse workshop elements in the offing for narrowing the reading gap. It s always good to have a theme for the workshop so that participants zero in on problems pertaining to the teaching of reading. Once the logistics, mechanics and arrangements have been completed and finalized, all participants in the work shop may define problems for participant consideration pertaining to the theme "Narrowing the Gap in Reading Achievement." The following, as examples, among others might well be considered"

1. Understanding learners from minority groups.
2. Problems minority pupils experience in reading.
3. Helping pupils in phonics in closing the reading achievement gap.
4. Increasing pupil comprehension.
5. Developing minority pupil test taking skills.

After problem identification, participants in the workshop may volunteer as to which committee to be a member of . Chairpersons on each committee might be elected. Also, no chair persons might be elected, but leadership emerges as the need arises. Whoever within a committee presents content is the leader at that particular time. A secretary for each committee may give a progress report, at intervals, to all participants at the workshop. Committee members need to stay informed of findings within each committee. A final oral report and a printout of findings should be available to work shop participants at the close of the total sessions.

Ample time needs to be given to questions pertaining to workshop findings. Thorough indepth discussions within each committee meeting and also for the total findings at the end of the workshop are musts! The best ideas must prevail in terms of processes and products at the workshop. Major ideas presented at the workshop need to be tried out in a classroom setting. Results of the try out should provide feedback to workshop participants.

In addition to large group, small group or committee activities, individual endeavors also need to be included. Here, the participant may select a personal endeavor or problem to work on which is faced by the classroom teacher. The problem to be solved may include

1. finding information in working with mentally handicapped pupils who are mainstreamed.
2. do researching of findings for use in full inclusion of children in the regular classroom.

The participant has opportunities to researching data on a specific set of pupils who are categorized as full inclusion. The possibilities are endless in that the participant might even outline an experimental or correlational study on closing the gap pertaining to actually involving pupils taught in the local school or district setting.

Assessing Pupil Achievement in Closing the Gap

The gap in each pupil's achievement from where he/she was achieving to where the individual pupil's achievement level is presently, indicates the amount of gain made within an interval of time. There will still be a somewhat large achievement gap which needs to be overcome. Thus, there is a place in achievement which the child should ideally be achieving at. The gap in

achievement is from where the child is presently in achievement in each academic discipline to where he/she should be achieving. Pupils and the teacher need to overcome this gap! What can be done to eliminate this gap?

1. provide inexpensive sequential gifts to the individual who achieves challenging objectives of instruction.
2. assist the pupil to appraise the self in terms of optimal written goals of attainment.
3. help the pupil to identify what is not understood on a daily basis, in each academic area.
4. guide the pupil to achieve affective objectives of instruction by being a successful learner.
5. give meaningful opportunities for the pupil to use what is presently understood.
6. let each pupil state which major ideas has been learned during each Friday's review session. Change off with oral and written review statements.
7. work in dyads. Two pupils working together in drill nd practice activities to master basic challenging subject matter.
8. do reciprocal teaching with a child by changing off, teacher and child, as to who asks the other person sequential questions from the ongoing lesson.
9. engage each pupil in journal writing to record achievements and also record what is left to achieve. Entries should be dated.
10. provide clear, written homework assignments. Upon completion and return of the homework, it is evaluated by the teacher and then sent home to the pupil for correction of errors (Ediger, 2002, 125-128).

Workshops stress an outline of activities to be engaged in sequentially by participants. The outline provides a flexible framework for ongoing activities involvement participants. Thus, there are large group, small group or committee endeavors as well as individual work to be completed by a participant in a workshop. There needs ot be clear communication by workshop members among the different categories of participants in the workshop. A final and ongoing element in a workshop is evaluation of the involved processes and products. A final question which may be subdivided, pinpoints to the ultimate aim, "Did the workshop assist teachers in closing the gap in achievement among learners in the public school setting?"

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